


A Peek Behind The Scenes

Henry Kissinger was annoyed—and so was his boss. “I am getting hell every half hour from the President that we are not being tough enough on India,” fumed Richard Nixon’s national-security adviser. “He has just called me again. He does not believe we are carrying out his wishes. He wants to tilt in favor of Pakistan.” There was never any doubt about the direction in which the U.S. tilted during the fifteen-day war between India and Pakistan. But not until last week, when columnist Jack Anderson released a fascinating set of secret documents, did most people realize just how far the Administration was prepared to lean in pursuit of that lopsided posture. In vivid, movie-script fashion, the “Anderson papers” offered a rare glimpse into the inner sanctum of government—and an even rarer glimpse of an angry President whipping balky bureaucrats into line behind his unpopular policies.

This was no purloined study on the massive scale of importance of the Pentagon papers. Anderson’s disclosures, which revealed little of substance that was not already known, were based on classified minutes of meetings of the Washington Special Action Group (WSAG)—an *ad hoc* group of foreign-policy crisis managers called together by Kissinger. Still, the secret Anderson memoranda brought back memories of the Pentagon-papers controversy because in more muted form the new batch of secrets revived the old and inherent conflict between a government’s need for secrecy and a people’s right to know. They were also a reminder of the government’s fondness for operating in the dark by indiscriminately stamping “secret” on most of its deliberations and decisions. Finally, by offering a peek behind the scenes of the top councils of government, the documents showed that neither Mr. Nixon nor Kissinger was immune to error, pique or prejudice.

When the secret documents first set off a public furor last week, they held out the enticing hope that they might explain the reasons behind the Administration’s puzzling policy—the support of Pakistan’s crumbling dictatorship against India’s democracy. Long before war broke out on the subcontinent, the Nixon Administration’s actions clearly showed its determined pro-Pakistan bi-



THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

CM-1360-71

SECRET/SENSITIVE
SECRET-SENSITIVE

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief of Staff, US Army
Chief of Staff, US Air Force
Chief of Naval Operations
Commandant of the Marine Corps

Subj: Washington Special Action Group Meeting on Indo/Pakistan Hostilities; 4 December 1971

1. Attached for your information is a memorandum for record concerning subject meeting.
2. In view of the sensitivity of information in the NSC system and the detailed nature of this memorandum, it is requested that access to it be limited to a strict need-to-know basis.

Ellsworth Davis—Washington Post

The ‘Anderson papers’: A glimpse into the government’s inner sanctum

as. But still the government rhetorically attempted to pretend that it was not hostile to India. To that end, in a “background” press conference called to stem a tide of criticism, Kissinger insisted that it was “totally inaccurate” to say that the U.S. was anti-Indian. Such ritual high-level insistence that Washington was sincerely pursuing an evenhanded policy on the subcontinent exploded in the government’s face when Anderson published the documents. And with a flair polished through 25 years as a muckraking reporter (THE MEDIA, page 83), Anderson dribbled out tidbits from the minutes in his nationally syndicated newspaper column, letting his readers search suspensefully for the rationale behind the Administration’s policy.

But, in fact, the documents stopped short of answering that fundamental question. For the minutes only shed light on the implementation of the policy, not on the thinking of the President. Yet in their own way, the three official memoranda opened an even more intriguing door, revealing as they did the manner in which many of the highest-ranking governmental officials work and talk and think (box). They exposed Kissinger’s exasperation at the sluggish (and largely pro-Indian) bureaucracy’s failure to adopt the hard-line stance in favor of Pakistan that Mr. Nixon wanted. At one point, Kissinger snapped, “The President says either the bureaucracy should put out the right statements on this or the White House will do it.” And they even revealed that in the midst of crisis, executive-suite jokes are not alien to the men who run the American Government. When Kissinger commented, “The President is blaming me, but you people are in the clear,” Assistant Secretary of State Joseph J. Sisco quipped, “That’s ideal.”

More seriously, the documents went a long way toward supporting the contention of Anderson and other Administration critics that Mr. Nixon not only pursued a one-sided policy but tried to

leave the public with the opposite impression. The day before Kissinger told the press that the Administration was not hostile to India, he demanded on Mr. Nixon’s behalf that WSAG act with a decided prejudice against India. He criticized the draft of a speech that U.S. Ambassador George Bush was to give at the United Nations as “too evenhanded”; he ordered that a cutoff of aid be “directed at India only,” and he instructed that “the Indian ambassador is not to be treated at too high a level.” Even more at odds with the explicitly stated tenets of U.S. policy was Kissinger’s clear implication that Mr. Nixon might consider providing military equipment to Pakistan—including shipping arms via a third nation despite a Congressional ban on such transfers.

Revealing as the WSAG minutes were of the inner workings of the government, they were by no means the only evidence of the White House bias or of a rift within the Administration. For Anderson also released excerpts from a secret cable from U.S. Ambassador to India Kenneth B. Keating detailing his repeatedly unsuccessful attempts to pull the Administration onto India’s side. There was a personal poignancy about Keating’s failures, for the silver-haired diplomat was a former law associate of Secretary of State William P. Rogers and had been rewarded with the ambassadorial plum in part to compensate for his defeat in the 1964 New York Senate race by the late Robert F. Kennedy. Boldly challenging Kissinger, Keating counseled the Administration that it was ignoring political as well as moral realities on the subcontinent. And he said that he did not believe such a policy would “either add to our position, or perhaps more importantly, to our credibility.”

Credibility was, in fact, one of the

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FOREIGN RELATIONS

The Kissinger Tilt

KISSINGER: *The President is blaming me, but you fellows are in the clear.*
SISCO: *That's ideal.*

That fleeting moment of levity during the secret deliberations of the elite Washington Special Action Group enlivened the classified documents released last week by Columnist Jack Anderson (see *THE PRESS*). While providing a rare, fascinating glimpse of uncertainty and candor among the President's top advisers as India waged its swift war to dismember Pakistan, the papers revealed nothing new of substance and fell far short of proving the columnist's assertion that the Administration had grossly deceived the public about its pro-Pakistani stance. They did discredit Henry Kissinger's claim during the action that the U.S. was not "anti-Indian," but the Administration's lack of neutrality had been evident all along.

While not comparable in scope or substance to the Pentagon papers, the Anderson revelations similarly constitute more an embarrassment to Government than a threat to national security. They include the minutes of three meetings of the Special Action Group, a unit of the National Security Council, which were attended by up to 19 representatives of such agencies as the CIA, AID, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the State and Defense departments. The dialogue at the meetings turned out to be coolly colloquial. Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson referred to the emerging nation of Bangladesh as "an international basket case," while Henry Kissinger argued that at least it need not be "our basket case." Pakistanis were always called "Paks," and the two sections of that nation were the East and West "wings." An impending U.S. decision became "the next state of play."

Twelve Days. More substantially, even on the second day of fighting the highest experts seemed to know little more about the action than they could have read in their newspapers. The minutes note that CIA Director Richard Helms "indicated that we do not know who started the current action." Kissinger asked the CIA to prepare a report on "who did what to whom and when." The military representatives stuck their necks out when asked how long it would take the Indian army to force a Pakistani surrender in the East. Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, Chief of Naval Operations, estimated one or two weeks; Army Chief of Staff William Westmoreland said as many as three. It took twelve days.

As reported widely last month, President Nixon was furious at Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi because during her visit to Washington

in November, she gave no indication that India intended to go to war with Pakistan. The Anderson papers illustrate the intensity of Nixon's anger at New Delhi: "I am getting hell every half-hour from the President that we are not being tough enough on India," Kissinger told the meeting on Dec. 3. "He has just called me again. He does not believe we are carrying out his wishes. He wants to tilt in favor of Pakistan. He feels everything we do comes out otherwise."

This apparently indicated that Nixon



"Somebody around here has been putting out accurate information."

on was being frustrated by lower officials at the State and Defense departments who wanted a more evenhanded approach. The secret minutes later reported: "Dr. Kissinger said that whoever is putting out background information is provoking presidential wrath. The President is under the illusion that he is giving instructions, not that he is merely being kept apprised of affairs."

Among those who opposed the Nixon-Kissinger policy was the U.S. ambassador in New Delhi, Kenneth Keating. In a secret cable, he complained that Washington's policy did not fit the facts and injured American credibility in the world. The White House was also unmoved by concern in some Pentagon quarters that the Administration's policy was giving the Soviet Union new military advantages in South Asia.

What motivated Nixon to reject such arguments? The Administration claims—and the documents confirm this—that a major concern was to discourage and prevent India from trying to knock over all of West Pakistan as well as the East "wing." Nixon and Kissinger evidently believed that a more or less friendly U.S. attitude, New Delhi would strike at West Pakistan (al-

though there is no real evidence to support this); hence they reasoned that the U.S. had to cool the Indians by adopting a pro-Pakistan "tilt." Referring to the West, Kissinger told the group that "it is quite obvious that the President is not inclined to let the Paks be defeated." Kissinger even inquired whether the U.S. could secretly supply arms to West Pakistan through a third party, such as Jordan or Saudi Arabia—an action that would have totally deceived the U.S. public—but he desisted when advised that this would violate long-standing U.S. policy.

Nixon and Kissinger obviously also believed that the Soviet Union, which signed a friendship treaty with India last August, was well entrenched in New Delhi; an evenhanded policy not tilted toward Pakistan would not have changed the basic fact of Soviet arms aid to India. But a pro-Indian policy would have antagonized Pakistan and its mentor Peking. Thus, apparently afraid that the President's Peking mission might be jeopardized, the Administration favored Pakistan over India. The Moscow summit was in hazard as well, since the big powers might have come to a direct confrontation over the war.

Cardinal Rule. This rationale makes a certain amount of sense, but is also open to serious criticism. The most emotional but least pertinent argument is that Pakistan was a corrupt military dictatorship while India is "the world's largest democracy." The U.S. has sided, and will have to side again, with all kinds of unpleasant regimes, including Communist ones. The more serious case against the Administration's actions is that 1) the pro-Pakistan policy may actually have encouraged the war; for instance, the Indians were infuriated that the U.S. failed to protest vigorously the imprisonment of Bengali Leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and that it never spoke out forcefully against Pakistan's brutal repression in its eastern province; 2) a more careful, neutral stance rather than publicly branding India the aggressor need not have jeopardized the President's China initiative and could have reduced Soviet influence in India at least marginally.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the whole unhappy episode was the surprising extent to which the President seemed to be acting out of anger at what he considered India's duplicity and its threat to his grand design in foreign policy. He apparently had ignored his own cardinal rule of presidential decision making, stated only last month to *TIME* White House Correspondent Jerrold Schecter: "Great decisions, if they are to be good decisions, must be made coolly; and if you are not cool, you cannot make good decisions."